

ERIE-NIAGARA REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

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Co-Chairs:

Hon. Clyde Burmaster

Hon. William A. Pauly

Minutes of Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership Meeting

March 30, 2001

Present: Burmaster, Connolly, Eldridge, Ferraro, Lehman (proxy), Meal, Morse, O'Connor, Simon, Weinstein, Wendel

Excused: Schuler

Absent: Coan, DeBenedetti, Dziedzic, Erck, Greenan, Johnston, McMahon, Pauly, Peoples, Rubin, Rutecki, Villani

Co-Chair Burmaster called the meeting to order at 8 a.m. Minutes of the January, 2001 meeting were approved.

The Economic Development Subcommittee report was received and filed. The Government Affairs Subcommittee report was received and filed. The Tourism and Culture's Subcommittee report was received and filed. The Transportation Subcommittee report was received and filed.

On the topic of power relicensing, it was stated that there is an RCC meeting pending on April 10. Delphi Stakeholder groups are coordinating their efforts. ENRP member Connolly asked if businesses are involved in RCC, and ENRP member Ferraro responded by saying that he recently met with 75 of the 103 companies who use this power.

Ferraro brought up the topic of the Erie-Niagara Regional Planning Board. Tom Kucharski stated that County Executive Giambra is open to suggestions at this point. He wants to work with what is already here, coordinated into a larger effort. The BNE was then asked about the topic of a regional planning council. ENRP Member Lehman is handling updates on the County Executive's proposal. Ferraro stated that grant opportunities have been missed. He also stated that a formal board (with staff) is needed, and that we have been hurt by the current lack of one. ENRP member Wendel agreed. ENRP co-chair Burmaster stated that circumstances in the past couple of years have changed, especially with the ENRP, and a big step forward has been made. Albany desires a collaborative effort. Kucharski answered ENRP member Meal's question about taking the lead with the initiative by stating that folks must come together first. **The ENRP authorized the Government Affairs Subcommittee to pursue this concept.** All those talking should come together, and work up a budget.

(cont.)

Members: Hon. John Connolly * Hon. Albert DeBenedetti * Mr. Thomas Dziedzic * Mr. Brian Eldridge * Hon. Bradley Erck * Mr. Samuel Ferraro * Hon. John Greenan * Mr. Clyde Johnston * Mr. Thomas Kucharski * Ms. Maria Lehman * Hon. Peter McMahon * Hon. Gerald Meal * Mr. Robert Miller * Hon. Sean O'Connor * Hon. Crystal Peoples * Mr. Lawrence Rubin * Mr. David Rutecki * Mr. Kevin Schuler * Mr. John Simon * Hon. Robert Villani * Hon. Barry Weinstein, M.D. * Mr. Peter Wendel * Ad Hoc: Ms. Cyd Bennett, Mr. Richard Geiger, Mr. Luke Rich, Mr. Stan Rydelek

This month's presentation concerned site readiness and was given by Tom Kucharski and Christina Orsi of the BNE. They were introduced by ENRP member Weinstein. Kucharski gave an example of regional cooperation. In the Lehigh Valley area, 76 governments came together. Our area needs labor characteristics and site information. The area has significant resources, but is doing a bad job of matching up with what is needed. In Pennsylvania, a RFP was created for site selection to do a study. If someone was bringing a project to the community, what would they think? In Pennsylvania, they looked at land use issues, and took municipal boundaries off when they obstructed with progress. Sites that seemed appropriate for potential businesses were designated and such. At that point, Lehigh Valley officials moved toward making the sites shovel-ready.

Kucharski then outlined steps Buffalo Niagara needs to take to advance their cause. Time periods to obtain permits must be substantially reduced. The current situation is so bad that many companies remove Buffalo Niagara from their lists initially. Buffalo Niagara is the third highest in taxes, fifth highest in utilities, and the 28th most expensive region in which to do business. However, the region is getting back on lists for other reasons, namely the availability of high quality labor.

Cost for an adequate study on advancing the region's business climate could be \$100,000 or more. The BNE would put some of their own resources into it. Ideally, they would bring someone in to look at the business climate who is not interested in the area to begin with. The findings could fit into a regional initiative, and add to the REDD. Acting like a major metropolitan area and being professional can also help advance the region. A RFP would be written with Economic Development personnel. Low land costs in the area make Buffalo Niagara a gold mine, but the expense associated with getting work accomplished is a horror story. Buffalo Niagara must act to compete not just with North Carolina, but Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio, and Canada.

Kucharski then stated that the high percentage of area workers in unions (34%) is three times the national average and scares away any companies. Weinstein stated that the ENRP should give concept approval, and that the Legislatures should be notified that the ENRP wants to move ahead with determining cost figures. **Concept approval was granted for the BNE project.** The legislation should be finalized at the Government Affairs Subcommittee April meeting. Kucharski also said that warehousing, distribution, and transportation industries are missed opportunities.